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SUBJECT: GAZA PULL-OUT GETS CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH FROM UNEP
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT TEAM

REF: 2005 JERUSALEM 5670

11. (SBU) Summary: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) announced March 30 that its environmental assessment had yielded a "clean bill of health" for the former Israeli settlement areas in Gaza. Key conclusions were that certain areas needed minor clean-up and a land use plan. UNEP said the PA needed to develop waste and coastal zone management and a monitoring system for groundwater in Gaza. Palestinian Environmental Quality Authority (EQA) head Yusif Abu Safiyeh was quoted in the press as saying that he disagreed with the "good" results and the methodology of the assessment. End Summary.

12. (SBU) In a March 30 briefing, UNEP Post-Conflict Branch Chief Henrik Slotte said that, despite some localized pollution and issues associated with asbestos in the former Israeli settlements, there was no contamination of water, land, or buildings that threatened the environment or public health. He cautioned that the Palestinian Authority (PA) needed to implement UNEP recommendations and follow-up actions in order to avoid potential environmental hazards. UNEP was prepared to assist on clean-up activities, training on asbestos removal, and the development of relevant environmental management plans, he said.

13. (SBU) UNEP Operations Manager Muralee Thummarukudy presented the following key conclusions from the assessment:

-- Seven former settlement areas had localized spots of contamination, which required further clean-up;

-- In twelve former settlement areas and the Erez industrial area, fragments of asbestos debris were identified, and would require proper handling for disposal. UNEP was conducting a training seminar on asbestos handling in Egypt for Palestinian participants.

-- Eight of the twenty-one former settlement areas had associated waste dumps/landfills, which required land use restrictions and follow-up actions.

14. (SBU) As for the removal and disposal of rubble, Thummarukudy said that UNEP was working with UNDP to carry out the task of clearing and recycling 1.2 million tons of rubble produced by the destruction of settlement housing in Gaza.

15. (SBU) Thummarukudy elaborated on several follow-up actions for the PA including:

-- Developing a waste management strategy for Gaza that

included the disposal of the asbestos debris, handling of contaminated soil, and future plans for a number of landfills;

-- Carrying out coastal zone management in an integrated manner that covered the areas of coastal construction, effluent disposal areas, and dune disturbances;

-- Developing land use planning maps and making resource allocation decisions based on the information gathered during the environmental assessment;

-- Establishing a monitoring system for groundwater in Gaza, including the wells in the disengaged areas.

WALLES